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EFFECT OF SELF-MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE ON BULLYING TENDENCY AMONG PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN IDEMILI NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency among public secondary school students in Idemili North Local Government Area, Anambra State, Nigeria. The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design, specifically a non-randomized pretest-posttest control group design with a follow-up retention test. Two research questions guided the study, while two null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The population comprised 291 Senior Secondary two (SS2) students identified as having bullying tendency in the 13 public secondary schools in the area. A sample of 52 students identified as having bullying tendency was purposively drawn from two intact school groups, comprising 23 students in the experimental group and 29 in the control group. Data were collected using the Bullying Tendency Scale (BTS), a 20-item instrument adapted from the Illinois Bully Scale (Espelage & Holt, 2001). The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts, and a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.93 was obtained from a pilot study. Data were collected through direct administration. Mean scores were used to answer the research questions, while the null hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). The norm score of 50 served as the decision benchmark for identifying students with bullying tendency. Participants in the experimental group received self-management training, whereas those in the control group received conventional counselling. The findings revealed that self-management technique was effective in reducing bullying tendency, that its effect was significant when compared with conventional counselling, and that the reduction was significantly retained at follow-up. Based on the findings, it was recommended that school counsellors should adopt self-management technique as a regular counselling intervention for students with bullying tendency, that counsellors should be trained in its application, and that schools should incorporate structured counselling programmes into their disciplinary systems rather than relying solely on punishment.

Keywords: Self-management, Cognitive restructuring, Bullying tendency, Secondary, School students

Introduction

Bullying is one of the most persistent behavioural problems confronting secondary schools. It is commonly described as unwanted aggressive behaviour among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived imbalance of power and that is repeated, or likely to be repeated, over time (StopBullying.gov, 2024). It may be physical, verbal, relational or cyber in form, and it disrupts the safe and orderly climate that effective teaching and learning require. Before students engage in overt acts of bullying, however, there is usually a psychological readiness to do so. This readiness, referred to in this study as bullying tendency, reflects a student's likelihood or inclination to bully others. It may show itself in hostile attitudes towards peers, a desire for dominance, intolerance of differences and readiness to intimidate. Addressing bullying tendency is therefore a preventive strategy, because it seeks to modify the disposition before it hardens into repeated acts of bullying.

Nigerian studies show that bullying is neither rare nor harmless. Adeosun and Adegbohun (2015) found that bullying victimization among secondary school students in Lagos was associated with emotional and behavioural problems, including anxiety, depression and aggression. Akanni, Olashore, Osasona and Uwadiae (2020) reported that low parental supervision, peer influence and substance use predicted bullying perpetration among senior secondary school students in Benin City, while Raji, Bashir, Stephen, Umeokonkwo, Sufiyan, Abubakar and Sabitu (2021) identified male gender, peer influence and poor academic performance as predictors of bullying perpetration among adolescents in Sokoto Metropolis. Olumide, Adams and Amodu (2016) documented the perpetration of cyberbullying among in-school adolescents in Oyo State, and Obioha (2024) examined the link between interparental violence and school bullying among Nigerian adolescents. Longe and Adeyeye (2019) further showed that bullying and aggression tendencies were associated with delinquent behaviour, with self-control acting as a mediating factor. Taken together, these studies suggest that bullying tendency is shaped by family, peer and personal factors, and that it carries consequences for victims and perpetrators alike.

Schools have traditionally responded to bullying through disciplinary measures and conventional counselling. Conventional counselling in the school setting usually consists of advice-giving, moral instruction, warnings and occasional counselling sessions. Such approaches may create awareness and encourage students to behave appropriately, but they rarely equip students with the

skills required to regulate their own behaviour when provoked, tempted or influenced by peers. Consequently, bullying tendencies often persist despite routine counselling, and structured techniques that place the responsibility for change on the student deserve attention.

Self-management technique is one such approach. It refers to a set of deliberate strategies through which individuals observe, evaluate and regulate their own behaviour by means of self-monitoring, goal-setting, self-evaluation and self-reinforcement (Yu, 2023; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). The technique is rooted in Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which holds that people are not merely products of their environments but agents capable of observing, judging and regulating their own conduct. A student who records when and why he teases, threatens or excludes others, sets a specific goal to refrain from such acts, evaluates his own progress and rewards himself for restraint is gradually replacing an impulsive pattern of behaviour with a controlled one. Because the skills are learned and practised by the student, they are expected to operate without constant adult supervision.

Empirical evidence supports the use of self-management strategies in curbing aggression and bullying. Anyamene and Onu (2023) found that self-management technique significantly reduced the tendency to aggressive behaviour among secondary school adolescents in Enugu North Local Government Area, while Igbineweka and Jesuorobo (2022) reported that self-control technique significantly reduced bullying tendencies among primary school pupils in Edo State. Similarly, Isiaku (2016) found that self-management counselling significantly reduced bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Katsina State, and Umaru (2013) reported that self-monitoring and management strategies reduced violent behaviour among senior secondary school students in Kaduna State. Ismail, Rama, Strohmeier and Yanagida (2024) also associated anti-bullying intervention with lower bullying and cyberbullying rates in Albanian schools. Although these studies point to the value of self-regulation skills, few of them examined whether the reduction in bullying is retained after treatment, and none was located that examined the effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency among public secondary school students in Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State. This gap in knowledge provided the justification for the present study.

Therefore, this study investigated the effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency among public secondary school students in Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State, and the extent to which any reduction achieved was retained after treatment.

Statement of the Problem

Bullying tendency among secondary school students continues to pose a significant challenge to the educational environment, peer relationships and the emotional well-being of students in Nigeria, including Anambra State. Bullying tendencies, which include aggressive thought patterns, poor emotional regulation and a propensity for dominance-seeking behaviour, often precede actual bullying and may go undetected until they escalate. Students who are exposed to bullying often experience fear, anxiety, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, poor academic performance and, in some cases, school avoidance, while students who bully are at risk of developing persistent aggressive and antisocial behaviours that may extend into adulthood.

Despite increasing awareness of bullying in Nigerian schools, the behavioural dispositions that give rise to it are often overlooked in policy and practice. In many schools, the response remains largely punitive, focusing on punishment rather than prevention or behavioural modification, and the routine counselling offered to students is general in nature. The prevalence of bullying in secondary schools nevertheless remains a concern, suggesting that existing approaches may not be sufficiently effective in helping students to control the tendencies that predispose them to bullying.

Self-management technique, which trains students to monitor, evaluate and reinforce their own behaviour, offers a non-punitive alternative that has been reported to reduce aggressive behaviour in other settings. There is, however, limited empirical evidence on its effectiveness in reducing bullying tendency, and on whether the reduction is retained over time, among public secondary school students in Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State. It is against this background that this study was undertaken to determine the effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency among public secondary school students in the area.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine the effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency of secondary school students in Idemili North Local Government Area. Specifically, this study intends to determine:

1. The effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency of secondary school students when compared with those treated with conventional counselling using their pre-test and post-test scores.
2. The retention effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency of secondary school students when compared with those treated with conventional counselling using their post-test and delayed post-test (retention) scores.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency of secondary school students when compared with those given conventional counselling using their pre-test and post-test mean scores?
2. What is the retention effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency of secondary school students when compared with those given conventional counselling using their post-test and delayed post-test mean scores?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the pre-test and post-test bullying tendency mean scores of secondary school students exposed to self-management technique when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling.
2. There is no significant difference in the post-test and retention-test bullying tendency mean scores of secondary school students exposed to self-management technique when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling.

Method and Procedure

The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design, specifically the non-randomized pretest-posttest control group design with a follow-up retention test. The design was chosen because the study was conducted in a school setting where random assignment of students to groups would disrupt school activities. The parent investigation involved three intact groups, one treated with self-management technique, one treated with cognitive restructuring technique and one control

group. This article reports the comparison between the self-management group (experimental group) and the control group, which received conventional counselling from the school counsellor. Bullying tendency was the dependent variable, measured at pre-test, post-test and retention test, while self-management technique was the independent variable.

The study was conducted in Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State, in the Ogidi Education Zone. The area is urban, well populated and commercialized, and it hosts a number of secondary schools. The choice of the area was informed by the researcher's observation of the prevalence of bullying among secondary school students there.

The population comprised 291 SS2 students identified, using the norm of the instrument, as having bullying tendency in the 13 public secondary schools in the area, out of a total of 1,930 SS2 students (Post Primary Schools Commission, Ogidi Education Zone, 2025/2026). SS2 students were selected because peer interactions are intense at this stage of adolescence and because they have spent enough time in school to have developed established social and behavioural patterns. A purposive sampling technique was employed because only students with bullying tendency were eligible for the intervention. The three public secondary schools with the highest numbers of such students were selected and the students were treated as intact groups in their schools. Of the 79 students in the parent study, the 23 students in the self-management school and the 29 students in the control school, making 52 participants in all, constitute the sample for this article.

The instrument for data collection was the Bullying Tendency Scale (BTS), a 20-item questionnaire adapted from the Illinois Bully Scale (Espelage & Holt, 2001). The items were modified to suit the Nigerian secondary school context while retaining the core constructs of physical, verbal and relational aggression. Responses were rated on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). Both positively and negatively worded items were included to reduce response bias, and negatively worded items were reverse scored, so that total scores ranged from 20 to 80, with higher scores indicating higher bullying tendency. A score above the norm of 50 was taken as evidence of bullying tendency.

The scale was subjected to face and content validation by three experts, one from Measurement and Evaluation and two from Guidance and Counselling, who assessed the items for clarity, relevance and adequacy, and whose suggestions were incorporated. For reliability, the instrument was administered to 30 senior secondary school students in the Onitsha Education Zone, outside

the study area but with similar characteristics to the study population. Analysis with Cronbach alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.93, which exceeds the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 and indicates high internal consistency.

Data collection was done in three phases, namely pre-test before treatment, post-test immediately after treatment and a retention test after the post-test. The researcher, assisted by two research assistants who had been trained on the administration of the instrument and the treatment procedure, visited the schools, explained the purpose of the exercise, assured the students of confidentiality and guided them in completing the questionnaire. The completed copies were collected immediately and scored. Students who scored above the norm of 50 at the pre-test were retained for the study. The experimental group received self-management training in group counselling for six weeks, one session per week of 40 to 45 minutes, during the class counselling period agreed with the school counsellors. The sessions covered the identification of bullying behaviours and their triggers, self-monitoring with a behaviour observation chart, goal-setting and personal commitment statements, self-evaluation and self-reinforcement, coping strategies such as deep breathing, counting to ten and walking away when provoked, and a final review of the skills learned. The control group received conventional counselling from the school counsellor without the self-management package. The post-test was administered at the end of the six weeks, and the retention test was administered to all groups two weeks later to verify whether the effects of the treatment were retained.

Extraneous variables were controlled in several ways. Instrumentation bias was controlled by using the same instrument, under similar conditions, at every test point. Treatment diffusion was controlled by conducting the sessions in different schools and instructing participants not to discuss the activities with members of other groups. Experimental bias was controlled by giving the control group conventional counselling, so that all groups had counselling contact, and by administering the same tests to all groups.

The data were analysed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Mean scores were used to answer the research questions, while the null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), with the pre-test scores serving as covariate for the post-test analysis and the post-test scores serving as covariate for the retention analysis. For the research questions, a post-test mean score below the norm of 50

indicated that the technique was effective in reducing bullying tendency. A null hypothesis was rejected where the p-value was less than 0.05 and not rejected where it was greater than 0.05.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from the field for this study were analysed and the summaries were presented in tables to highlight the findings. The findings were then discussed.

Research Question 1

What is the effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency of secondary school students when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their pre-test and post-test mean scores?

Table 1: Pretest and posttest bullying tendency mean scores of secondary school students treated with self-management technique and those treated with conventional counselling (Norm = 50)

Source of Variation	N	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	Mean Gain	Decision
Self-management technique	23	63.30 (6.10)	35.78 (5.27)	28.52	Effective
Conventional counselling	29	64.28 (5.25)	54.24 (4.43)	10.04	Not effective

SD = standard deviation. Mean gain = pretest mean minus posttest mean.

Table 1 shows that the students treated with self-management technique had a pre-test mean score of 63.30 and a post-test mean score of 35.78, a mean gain (reduction) of 28.52 in bullying tendency. In contrast, students in the control group who received conventional counselling had a pre-test mean score of 64.28 and a post-test mean score of 54.24, a mean gain of 10.04. Since the post-test mean score of 35.78 for the experimental group is below the norm of 50, self-management technique was effective in reducing bullying tendency among secondary school students in Idemili North Local Government Area. The post-test mean of the control group remained above the norm.

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the pre-test and post-test bullying tendency mean scores of secondary school students exposed to self-management technique when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling.

Table 2: ANCOVA on the effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency of students when compared with those who received conventional counselling

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	Cal. F	p-value	Decision
Corrected Model	7349.759	2	3674.879	98.805	.000	
Intercept	572.157	1	572.157	15.383	.000	
Pretest (covariate)	106.577	1	106.577	2.865	.097	
Treatment Models	**6539.480**	**1**	**6539.480**	**175.824***	**.000***	**Significant**
Error	1822.472	49	37.193			
Total	108616.000	52				
Corrected Total	9172.231	51				

* Significant at $p \leq 0.05$. $R^2 = .801$ (Adjusted $R^2 = .793$).

Table 2 indicates that at the 0.05 level of significance, with 1 degree of freedom for the numerator and 49 for the denominator, the calculated F was 175.82 with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the first null hypothesis was rejected. The effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency of secondary school students is significant when compared with conventional counselling, and the treatment accounted for a large share of the variance in post-test scores (partial $\eta^2 = .78$).

This finding is consistent with earlier studies which reported that self-management and related self-regulation strategies are effective in reducing aggression and bullying among students. It agrees with Anyamene and Onu (2023), who found that self-management technique significantly reduced the tendency to aggressive behaviour among secondary school adolescents in Enugu North Local Government Area. It also supports Isiaku (2016), who reported that self-management counselling significantly reduced bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Katsina State, Umaru (2013), who found that self-monitoring and management strategies reduced violent behaviour among senior secondary school students in Kaduna State, and Igbineweka and Jesuorobo (2022), who found that self-control technique significantly reduced bullying tendencies among primary school pupils in Edo State. The finding is further in line with Ismail et al. (2024), who associated anti-bullying intervention with lower bullying and cyberbullying rates in schools.

The effect of self-management technique in this study may be explained by the nature of the training given to the students. Through self-monitoring, the students became aware of when, why

and how often they teased, threatened or excluded others. Goal-setting and personal commitment statements gave them a clear standard against which to judge their conduct, while self-evaluation and self-reinforcement rewarded restraint and strengthened the behaviours they were trying to acquire. The coping strategies practised in role-play, such as deep breathing, counting to ten and walking away, gave them alternatives to aggressive reactions when provoked. This is in line with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which explains that individuals can regulate their own behaviour through self-observation, self-evaluation and self-reinforcement, and that a stronger belief in one's ability to exercise control makes it more likely that the behaviour will change. Conventional counselling, on the other hand, relied largely on advice and persuasion and did not require the students to practise these skills, which may explain why the control group remained above the norm.

Research Question 2

What is the retention effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency of secondary school students when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their post-test and delayed post-test mean scores?

Table 3: Posttest and delayed posttest bullying tendency mean scores of secondary school students treated with self-management technique and those treated with conventional counselling (Norm = 50)

Source of Variation	N	Posttest Mean (SD)	Delayed Posttest Mean (SD)	Mean Change	Decision
Self-management technique	23	35.78 (5.27)	37.00 (5.80)	+1.22	Reduction retained
Conventional counselling	29	54.24 (4.43)	54.83 (3.86)	+0.59	Above norm

Mean change = delayed posttest mean minus posttest mean. A positive value indicates a slight rise in bullying tendency after the post-test.

Table 3 shows that the students treated with self-management technique had a post-test mean score of 35.78 and a delayed post-test mean score of 37.00, a slight rise of 1.22 points, while the control group moved from 54.24 to 54.83, a rise of 0.59 points. The delayed post-test mean score of the experimental group (37.00) remained well below the norm of 50, whereas that of the control group (54.83) remained above it. This indicates that the reduction in bullying tendency achieved through

self-management technique was largely retained, with only a marginal drift upward after treatment ended.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the post-test and retention-test bullying tendency mean scores of secondary school students exposed to self-management technique when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling.

Table 4: ANCOVA on the retention effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency of students when compared with those who received conventional counselling

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	Cal. F	p-value	Decision
Corrected Model	9748.612	2	4874.306	299.125	.000	
Intercept	1064.905	1	1064.905	65.351	.000	
Posttest (covariate)	93.151	1	93.151	5.716	.021	
Treatment Models	**1331.253**	**1**	**1331.253**	**81.696***	**.000***	**Significant**
Error	798.465	49	16.295			
Total	105324.000	52				
Corrected Total	10547.077	51				

* Significant at $p \leq 0.05$. $R^2 = .924$ (Adjusted $R^2 = .921$).

Table 4 reveals that at the 0.05 level of significance, with 1 and 49 degrees of freedom, the calculated F was 81.70 with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the second null hypothesis was rejected. The retention effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency of secondary school students is significant when compared with conventional counselling (partial $\eta^2 = .63$).

The significant retention effect suggests that the students internalized the self-regulation skills acquired during the treatment and continued to apply them after the counselling sessions had ended. Self-monitoring, goal-setting and self-reinforcement are skills that the student carries and practises independently, and, as Yu (2023) and Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) observed, such self-regulatory processes enable individuals to keep track of their progress and adjust their actions without constant external supervision. This is consistent with the view of Bandura (1986) that behaviour which is self-regulated and self-reinforced is more likely to be sustained than behaviour controlled only by external agents. The finding also agrees with Igbineweka and Jesuorobo (2022),

who reported that self-control training gave pupils lasting means of managing aggressive and impulsive behaviour, and with Longe and Adeyeye (2019), whose results showed that self-control operated as an important buffer between bullying tendency and later delinquent behaviour. The small upward drift observed in both groups after the post-test is, however, a reminder that the gains need to be reinforced through periodic follow-up sessions and continued support from counsellors, teachers and parents.

Summary of the Findings

From the analysis, the following findings were made:

1. Self-management technique was effective in reducing bullying tendency among secondary school students in Idemili North Local Government Area.
2. The effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency of secondary school students was significant when compared with conventional counselling.
3. Self-management technique was effective in retaining the reduction in bullying tendency among secondary school students, as the delayed post-test mean of the experimental group remained below the norm.
4. The retention effect of self-management technique on bullying tendency was significant when compared with conventional counselling.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that self-management technique is an effective counselling intervention for reducing bullying tendency among secondary school students in Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State. The technique significantly reduced bullying tendency when compared with conventional counselling, by helping students to develop self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-reinforcement and behavioural regulation skills.

The study further concluded that the reduction in bullying tendency was significantly retained after treatment, which suggests that the behavioural improvements achieved during the intervention were sustained over time. Overall, self-management technique is a practical, non-punitive and evidence-based counselling approach for reducing bullying tendency in secondary schools. Given

that the samples were small and were drawn from intact groups, the findings should be generalised with caution.

Implications of the Study

The following implications of the study were noted, based on the findings:

Self-management technique was found effective in reducing bullying tendency among secondary school students. This implies that school counsellors can adopt the technique to help students with bullying tendency to monitor and control their own behaviour, and that schools need not rely on punishment alone. Theoretically, the finding supports Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes self-regulation as a means of behaviour change.

The effect of self-management technique was significant when compared with conventional counselling. This implies that routine advice-giving and moral instruction may not be enough to reduce bullying tendency, and that structured, skill-based counselling programmes should complement or replace routine counselling where appropriate.

The reduction in bullying tendency was retained after treatment. This implies that the skills learned by the students can be sustained beyond the counselling period, which supports the introduction of self-management training as a preventive programme in schools, with periodic follow-up sessions to consolidate the gains.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. School counsellors should adopt self-management technique as a regular counselling intervention for students with bullying tendency, as the study established that the technique is effective and that its effect is retained.
2. School principals and educational administrators should incorporate structured counselling programmes such as self-management training into school disciplinary systems, rather than relying only on punishment as a corrective measure.
3. The Post Primary Schools Service Commission and the Anambra State Ministry of Education should organize regular workshops and in-service training for school counsellors and

teachers on the application of self-management technique, and should provide adequate counselling facilities and qualified counsellors in secondary schools.

4. Parents should be encouraged to monitor their children's behaviour and to support the application of self-management skills at home in collaboration with the school.

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